

The Future As It Will Be

By John Clayton

The announced closing of the Beallsville Post Office is one more phrase in a by-now-familiar theme: Bigger is better. The postal service, as a cost-saving measure, will close the Beallsville Post Office on August 1, 2010. People who depend on this office for their mail or for other services will be obliged to drive to Poolesville for service. I wonder where this trend will end.

It is never easy to cut costs. Not even considering the political ramifications and machinations, someone will get hurt, and it will probably be someone that doesn't deserve to get hurt. I think one of the hollowest statements that one can make is "Why don't they just cut costs?" without following it up with some semblance of a clue of what should be cut. It isn't easy. I challenge anyone at pretty much any level of government to find significant savings in any budget without comprising, to some degree, health, education, transportation, or public safety. Good luck with that.

Elsewhere in this issue we report Montgomery County Executive Ike Leggett's plan to face up to a \$780 million budget shortfall. The cuts involve furloughs, reductions-in-force, and other fairly drastic measures. These are especially drastic if it is your job or paycheck that is being affected. The Commonwealth of Virginia and other states are going through similar tough times. As we all know, many of these financial problems derive from downturns in the real estate and housing markets and their consequent effects on revenues. While this particular storm has been more savage than most, markets are necessarily cyclical in nature. In fact, I have read in a number of places that these boom and bust cycles are necessary to a free flowing and vibrant economy—it's the nature of the beast, and we have to live with it. That makes sense, but it reminds of the late Louis Rukeyser and his show *Wall Street Week*. Occasionally, while discussing the prospects of recession, some visiting economist or markets guru would explain to Louis that the current slowdown would in fact be a positive thing in the longer term. Rukeyser would respond with something like, "Oh, and will you be losing your job, then?"

I don't really have anything more enlightening to say about all of this, which should be fairly obvious if you have read this far, but living in the Monocacy area, in the Agricultural Reserve, I am concerned by how well small things function out here, and by how threatened small things seem to be. We have small MARC train stations that contribute to the use of mass transit for commuting in, yes, a small way—but it is quite large if you live near the Dickerson, or Boyds, or even the larger Barnesville station, and are able to drive a short distance and ride the rails into downtown D.C. We all remember the battle to keep the small stations open. Otherwise, all those other riders were going to have to go to Barnesville (where parking is already at capacity), or perhaps down to Germantown, or out to Point of Rocks, driving longer distances to these mega-stations. Monocacy Elementary School was next, although there has been at least a temporary stay. The children would just have to ride to Poolesville, or perhaps eventually they would have to ride to Germantown. Who knows where this all leads? Maybe a Wal-Mart will open up somewhere close, and the rest of the small stores can disappear. It's progress, and it's good for the economy—lower prices for everyone. That's really all that matters, isn't it?